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ABSTRACT

Career ladders have been proposed as one way to address problems rural and small schools have in recruiting academically able and talented teachers, recognizing them once they start teaching, and retaining them in the teaching role. While there are differences in career ladder plans, there are also some common features, e.g., predetermined criteria for advancement, objective evaluation procedures, opportunities for teachers to accept new roles in the higher steps, and stipulations for certification/training for advancement. Advantages of career ladders for individual teachers include both intrinsic and extrinsic rewards as well as providing a longitudinal framework within which teachers can form their own career decisions. Advantages for school districts are numerous, including enabling the full use of teacher potential, providing exemplary models for beginning teachers in a systematic way, providing a method to reward outstanding teachers, etc. Among potential problem areas are role definitions for teachers and administrators, school management and decision-making, funding, evaluation and continued training of teachers, etc. Several steps involving planning, commitment, sharing of information, and evaluation need to be followed before career ladders can be implemented in rural and small school districts. Funding will probably be the key determinant of success. Proposed career ladders are appended. (BRR)

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Are Teacher Career Ladder Plans Feasible in Rural and Small Schools?

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Rural and small schools have difficulty in recruiting academically able and talented teachers, recognizing them once they start teaching in the district, and retaining them in the teaching role. Career ladders have been proposed as one way to address these issues and retain outstanding teachers.

This paper will look at advantages and potential problem areas for career ladder plans, and also at what is needed for career ladder plans to work in rural and small schools.

Career Ladder Plans

In an effort to address the problems of the teaching career and the conditions of the workplace, a career ladder has been proposed to aid in the recruitment and retention of teachers. A career ladder is a plan which provides a variety of stages in a teaching career with different duties and different pay at each stage.

A number of educators have endorsed the concept of the career ladder. Woodring (1983, pp. 82-84) proposed three career stages with teachers at the top stage earning as much salary as administrators. Gideonse (1982) has called for hierarchially structured teams of teachers including staff teachers and lead teachers (pp. 17-18). Schlechty and Vance (1983) proposed that the career structure of teaching in public schools should be redesigned to include high-status roles that give classroom teachers with sufficient performance, commitment, and training responsibility for training other teachers and conducting research and development (p. 484). This system of differentiated staffing would give some teachers different types of responsibilities and authority than that afforded to others and would be a career structure that

promotes excellence, rewards commitment, and encourages continuous growth.

Career ladder plans have also been proposed by a number of educational organizations and state education departments. Some of these reports have provided details of the proposed career ladders while others have simply endorsed the career ladder concept with no additional details. Reports with details of the career ladder plans include the: (a) Tennessee Master Teacher Plan, (b) Utah Commission on Excellence Report, (c) Wisconsin Task Force on Teaching and Teacher Education Report, (d) Florida Education Association/United Report, (e) Charlotte-Mecklenburg (NC) Career Developent Plan, and (f) Shawnee (OK) Master Teacher Plan.

Organizations which have endorsed the concept of career ladders (but have not proposed details with the plans) include the: (a) Connecticut Board of Education, (b) National Commission on Excellence in Education, (c) Education Commission of the States, (d) National Association of School Boards of Education, and (e) Forum of Educational Leaders.

While there are differences in the career ladder plans proposed in these reports, there are also a number of common features. Most of the reports include three or four career steps, predetermined criteria for advancement to a new step, objective evaluation procedures, the opportunity for teachers to accept new roles in the higher steps (including involvement in he development of preservice and inservice teachers, curriculum development, staff development programs, research, and other activities), and stipulations for certain certification and training as requirements for advancement to certain steps in the career ladder. Summaries

of the career ladder plans from Tennessee, Utah, Wisconsin, and Florida are displayed in the Appendix to illustrate representative career ladder plans.

Advantages of Career Ladder Plans

Career ladders for teachers have been proposed in an effort to provide: (a) a formal procedure to recognize and use the full potential of master teachers, (b) a systematic way to provide exemplary models for beginning teachers, (c) different pay for different levels of teaching experience and expertise, (d) a system of promotion within teaching, (e) a career pattern to give teachers something to which they can aspire, (f) a means of attracting talented people to the classroom and retaining talented people in the classroom, and (g) a means of providing the profession with an avenue to improve its image and gain prestige.

There are a number of advantages of the career ladder plan for both the individual teachers and for the school districts. These advantages are listed below.

Advantages for Individual Teachers

1. More intrinsic rewards which result in personal and professional satisfaction and a desire to invest further effort by providing:
   a. Recognition and status for excellent teachers
   b. Options for diverse work responsibilities without leaving the classroom
   c. Opportunities for career advancement
   d. Career options within teaching and control over these options
   e. Opportunities for professional growth

2. More extrinsic rewards
   a. Higher pay as teachers advance into new levels on the career ladder
   b. Other improved aspects of the work environment such as working conditions, effects on personal and professional life, interpersonal relationships, training assistance, and others.
3. The career ladder provides a longitudinal framework within which teachers can form their own career decisions

Advantages for School Districts

1. Enables the district to use the full potential of the teachers
2. Provides exemplary models for beginning teachers in a systematic way
3. Provides a method to reward outstanding teachers
4. Encourages teachers, through the incentive of higher pay, to meet the higher criteria for teaching and other duties at higher levels on the career ladder
5. Results in more resource people to deal with staff development, curriculum development, and a variety of other responsibilities
6. Provides a framework to assist individual teachers in goal setting for professional growth
7. Provides the profession and the school district with an avenue to improve its image and gain in prestige
8. Provides a framework to aid in organizational decisions

dealing with facilitating continued development (concerning issues such as supervision, travel money, release time, etc.)

Potential Problem Areas

Problems with differentiated staffing plans in the 1960's and 1970's suggest that careful attention needs to be given to costs, role definitions, evaluation criteria and procedures, union support, and other areas (for example, see Cooper, 1972; Dempsey and Smith, 1972; English and Sharpes 1974; and Fiorino, 1972). In relation to a career ladder plan, areas to be examined carefully include the following:

1. Role Definitions for Teachers. Roles of teachers at each stage of the career ladder should be precisely defined.
2. Redefinition of Administrators' Roles. With teachers having the option of assuming some supervisory and administrative duties, the roles of principals, supervisors, and other administrators will need to be reexamined and redefined.
3. School Management and Decision-Making. With teachers making decisions about staff development, curriculum development, and other issues, the nature of school management and participative decision-making needs to be examined. It would be appropriate to use one type of management system. Among those to be considered would be the Japanese management style as in Theory Z or a number of American participative management models such as Blake and Mouton's managerial grid, Likert's System 4,

Greiner's participative management system, Tannenbaum and Schmidt's leadership continuum, and Herzberg's human relations model.

4. Funding. The costs for salaries of teachers and evaluators should be examined. The difference in pay at each career stage should make it worthwhile for teachers to seek advancement. Without adequate funding, the benefits of the career ladder plan would be jeopardized. The total amount of money spent on teachers' salaries would be higher that what currently exists in districts with single salary schedules.
5. Evaluation of Teachers. Evaluation criteria and procedures should be clearly described. Training for members of the evaluation team should be considered along with the logistics and costs for evaluation.
6. Continued Training for Teachers. School districts should carefully examine the need for personnel, time, money, and resources needed to aid in the continuing professional development of teachers.
7. Union Support. The involvement and support of teacher associations would affect the success of a career ladder plan. With teachers having the potential for assuming additional duties, contract negotiations might become more complicated.
8. Legal Issues. Conflicts with existing state laws or school district policies should be resolved, especially in the case of teacher evaluation.
9. Tenure and Certification. The relationship between the

stages in a career ladder and tenure and certification should be carefully defined.

10. Release Time for Teachers. Teachers in the higher steps of the career ladder might need some time out of the classroom to complete extra duties such as curriculum development work. Arrangements will have to be made for someone to take the teachers' classes during these times.
11. Performance Accountability. To have the career ladder work successfully, it is important that teachers be held accountable for the adequate completion of any extra duties they choose to assume.
12. Proper Planning. There should be careful planning for the transition time between the time the career plan is adopted and the time it is in full operation. Once enacted, time must also be arranged for the school staff to plan and coordinate their responsibilities on a regular basis.
13. Evaluation of the Career Ladder. There should be on-going evaluation of all aspects of the career ladder plan so that modifications can be made to correct any problem areas.

Implementing Career Ladders in Rural and Small Schools

Before career ladders can be implemented in rural and small school districts, several things would have to be done.

1. School board members, school administrators, and teachers need to recognize the problems of attracting, recognizing, and retaining outstanding teachers and be committed to

deal with the problems.

2. School personnel need to become informed about career ladders. A number of published reports are available which describe the features of career ladders that have been proposed in a number of school districts and states. By becoming familiar with these features, better decisions could be made about what would work best in a particular rural or small school district.
3. School personnel need to develop a career ladder model for their particular district. The unique nature of the rural and small school district must be considered.
4. Issues related to the career ladder model need to be addressed. These include some of the potential problem areas mentioned above such as funding, role definitions for teachers and administrators, training and evaluation procedures, performance accountability, and other issues.
5. A transition plan needs to be developed so that there is a smooth transition to implementation of the career ladder plan. With a transition plan, there is the recognition that the career ladder plan may not be fully operational in the first year or two of enactment.
6. The career ladder plan then should be enacted, starting with the transition plan that was identified.
7. The career ladder plan needs to be continually evaluated so that modifications can be made to correct any problem areas.

Funding probably will be the key determinant when enacting career ladder plans in rural and small schools. The difference in

pay at each career step should make it worthwhile for teachers to seek advancement. Without the incentive of higher pay at higher career steps, the benefits of the career ladder plan would be jeopardized. The total amount of money spent on teachers' salaries with a career ladder plan would be higher than what currently exists in districts with single salary schedules.

Summary

Nationwide interest in career ladder plans is evidenced by the number of school districts, state education agencies, and other educational institutions that are now starting to develop and implement incentive-pay and career ladder plans. The U.S. Education Department recently awarded over $1 million to 51 school districts, agencies, and institutions for the purpose of developing and implementing the pay-incentive plans. At least 25 of the districts or agencies receiving the awards had career ladders specifically mentioned in their proposals (Bridgman, 1984).

Many benefits can be gained through career ladder plans for teachers. Careful thought needs to be given to the issues identified above so that the full potential of the plans can be achieved. Rural and small school districts need to be committed to improving the conditions of the workplace for teachers, carefully work out a plan, and arrange for the appropriate resources and other arrangements.

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Appendix

Examples of Proposed Career Ladders

Source	Steps	Responsibilities	Pay	Other
Tennessee Master Teacher Program	Apprentice Teacher (3-year certificate)	Classroom teaching with regular observation & evaluation by senior & master teachers & administrators		Selected by completing an approved program & pass the National Teachers Exam
(In Journal of Teacher Education, March-April 1983)	Professional Teacher (5-year certificate)		$1,000 annually over usual increments	Apply to Master Teacher Certification Board for selection
	Senior Teacher (5-year certificate)	Work in summer with gifted or remedial students; conduct inservice programs; develop curricula observe & counsel apprentice teachers	$2,000 annually over usual increment & if on an 11 month contract, $4,000 annual supplement	Apply to Master Teacher Certification Board for selection. Renew certificates every 5 years. The state will pay salary supplements for 25% of districts' teachers.
	Master Teachers		$3,000 annually over usual increments. $5,000 for 11-month contract & $7,000 for 12 month contracts.	Renew certificates every 5 years. The state will pay salary supplements for 15% of districts' teachers.

Source	Steps	Responsibilities	Pay	Other
Utah Commission on Excellence	Apprentice Teacher	Teach	Base Pay of $17,500 with yearly increments based on performance	Would hold provisional certificates and would be supervised by master teachers for 2-3 years. There is no fixed ratio or percent of the district's teachers in the three steps.
(Education Week, Oct. 19, 1983; Vol. 3, No. 7, p. 8)	Professional Teachers	Responsible for program development and for supervision of student teachers	Base pay would be 15% higher than that of apprentice teachers (or $20,125).	Maximum salary of 75% more than the base pay for apprentice teachers (or $30,625)
	Teacher Leaders	Responsible for the development of curriculum & instruction in their own school	Base pay would vary according to the degree of responsibilities, evaluation, and length of contract	Salary range would be from about 75% more than the apprentice base salary ($30,625) and "top off" at about $40,000. Required to have a professional certificate and an appropriately competence of teaching skills as assessed by a committee of peers and other professionals including the principal.

Source	Steps	Responsibilities	Pay	Other
Wisconsin Task Force on Teaching and Teacher Education	1. Associate Teachers	Teach	Minimum salaries for each career step will be identified	Will receive a one-year license. Advancement may occur after being positively evaluated by an evaluation team and after making progress in a planned program of professional development.
	2. Professional Teachers	Teach		Will receive a five-year license renewable upon presentation of evidence of satisfactory performance and continuing professional development. May stay at this step or seek to advance to the teacher specialist or the career teacher levels.
(Final Report; State Superintendent's Task Force on Teaching and Teacher Education. January 1984. Bulletin No. 4250 from the Wisconsin Dept. of Public Instruction)	3-A. Teacher Specialist	At least ½ time teaching. Work in specialized activities such as curriculum or staff development.		Will have an extended term of employment. Will receive a five-year license renewable upon evidence of satisfactory performance in both their classroom and specialist responsibilities and their continuing professional development.
	3-B. Career Teacher	Full-time classroom teaching.		Superlative teachers who choose to remain in the classroom. Will have an extended term of employment. Required to meet rigorous criteria. Will receive a five-year renewable license upon evidence of continuing excellent performance and continuing professional development.

Source	Steps	Responsibilities	Pay	Other
Florida Education Association/United (affiliated with the AFT)	Apprentice Teachers			Within 5 years, in order to be eligible to be a senior teacher, apprentices would have to earn a masters degree in their field and be deemed successful by a team of evaluators from outside the school. If, after 5 years, these requirements are not met, the teacher would not be permitted to continue teaching.
(Education Week, Oct. 26, 1983, Vol. 3, No. 8, p. 8)	Senior Teachers	Spend all their time teaching, have 10-month contracts	$5,000 increment from the state	Can move to this level only after 3 years at the apprentice level. No limit on the number who could become senior teachers. Can stay at this level, provided they continue to pass periodic examinations.
	Associate Master Teachers	75-100% of time teaching; rest of time working with apprentices and on curriculum development. 11-month contract.	An additional $5,000 from the state	After 3 years at the senior level, teachers would be eligible to become an associate master teacher. To move to this level, senior teachers would need to undergo an in-depth evaluation and would participate in some type of further training.
	Master Teachers	50% of time teaching; 12-month contract	An additional $5,000 from the state	After 3 years at the associate master teacher level (9-12 years after the start of their teaching career), associate master teachers would be eligible to become master teachers, again after evaluation and training.